

ENDRICH

HALLOWEEN



STORY AND ARTWORK
SHARINA KASH GARDNER

Halloween.

HE HA HA HA
TENCE

HIEE!

I'M THE WOLF OF
THE WOODS, RAWR!

Seamus told me that at this time of year, the intra-dimensional membranes within ley lines were at their most permeable. My fine feathered friend Maggie says something similar, about a veil being thinnest. Honestly, I don't get either explanation. But to me, Halloween is, and probably always will be, when monsters prowl the streets and when the dead come back to life.

SPACE FOR RENT 555-971-1209

Don't believe me? It even happens on the simplest, most mundane levels. Take a look at the closed store fronts in town. Some of the empty husks suddenly spring back to life again, as seasonal Halloween shops. While Christmas, my favorite holiday, simply takes over everything... Halloween sneaks in through the cracks.

HOUSE OF HALLOWEEN

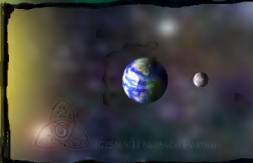
I remember how I saw this holiday when I was a kid. If you could ask my ten-year-old self, she'd tell you that while some of the monsters out there were people in masks... some of the monsters were real. Funny thing... I think that now, as an adult, I'd believe my younger self.

AROO

After all... now
I am a monster.



At the full moon, werewolves like myself have to Change. Whether we like it or not, we go all wofly. At one point, I'd made the mistake of asking Seanus, my resident know-it-all, why werewolves didn't just stay inside during the full moon, so the light didn't change them. After a long, very technical lecture, he basically said that it was gravity and the fluctuation of the earth's geomagnetic field that triggered the Change, and the moonlight helped only as a psychological trigger. After all, moonlight is really just reflected sunlight.



Anyway, apparently when a werewolf's body is sensitive to certain gravitational forces. Even though the gravitational effects are "practically negligible," when a werewolf of the "grohll" variety like myself feels both the gravitational pull of the earth and the sun from one direction, and then the pull of the moon from nearly the opposite direction, it, along with some nonsense about the moon messing with geometric fields triggers the change. Though, Seanus does say that like other monthly cycles, it's not a perfect biological process. Thus, sometimes, it will come a day early or a day late, though technically still on one of the three days that people consider the full moon. Fantastic.

Although, according to Seanus, this full moon stuff isn't really all that weird. Lots of animal behaviors are altered by the full moon, be it mating or getting into trouble. Heck, even among humans, the full moon plays a part. Did you know that some folks swear that more babies are born on a full moon? Seanus says there's not enough evidence to support it, but he believes it too. He says the same about something called Lunar Effect. It's just a theory, but it says that the full moon makes some, if not all people more emotionally charged, even aggressive. That's apparently how we got the word lunatic.



Of course, if I told any normal person that I was a werewolf, that's just what they'd call me: a lunatic.





SO! FAITH!

SINCE YOU GOT THE CHANGE
OUT OF YOUR SYSTEM... MAYBE TOMORROW
NIGHT WE SHOULD GO TO A HAUNTED HOUSE?
OLD MAN JOHN HAS A REALLY GREAT ONE IN THE
BACK OF HIS TOY SHOP. HE ONLY OPENS
IT UP AT HALLOWEEN.



SEAMUS SAYS THAT
SINCE I'M STILL KIND OF MESSED
UP BECAUSE I WASN'T BITTEN ON A FULL
MOON, THAT I SHOULD PLAY IT SAFE AND
NOT BE FAR FROM THE WOODS UNTIL
AFTER TOMORROW. HE SAYS I
MIGHT CHANGE AGAIN.



OHI THAT'S A
GRRREAT IDEA!

WELL...
MAYBE THE NEXT DAY?



WHAT'S IT TO
YOU? YOU DON'T
EVEN HAVE A HUMAN
FORM, IT'S NOT LIKE YOU
GO VISITING HAUNTED
HOUSES.



GIMCK TMM.
DAY AFTER TOMOR-
ROW. DEAL?

DEAL

So... I didn't wolf out the next day. Yippee, I'm not a total loser at this wolf stuff. And a day later, I found out that Mapleveiw loves Halloween. I mean, looooves it. Cornstalks were tied to every telephone pole, pumpkins were in every window. Festive Halloween tunes like Thriller, Ghost Busters, and The Monster Mash were played on the street and the whole place smelled like popcorn balls and candied apples.



(C)SMG JJ Nishoba Hooping

There were still two days till Halloween and people were already dressed up and wandering the streets.

HERE WE ARE!

Some of the costumes were... really good.

HEY JOHN! WE'RE
HERE FOR THE HAUNTED
HOUSE!

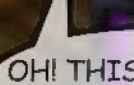
OH! THIS IS FAITH!
SHE'S A WEREWOLF!

MAGGIE!

H. LF.

MAGGIE, GOOD TO SEE YA,
YA NOISY FEATHERDUSTER!
WHO'S YOUR FRIEND?

OH, SIMMER DOWN. A
FURBALL AND A FEATHERDUSTER
AIN'T GONNA UPSET AN OLD LINDORM
LIKE M'SELF.



OH! THIS IS FAITH.
SHE'S A WEREWOLF.

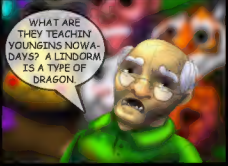
MAGGIE!

MAGGIE!

OH, SIMMER DOWN. A
FURBALL AND A FEATHERDUSTER
AIN'T GONNA UPSET AN OLD LINDORM
LIKE M'SELF.



WHAT THE HECK
IS A LINDORM?



WHAT ARE
THEY TEACHIN'
YOUNGINS NOW-
DAYS? A LINDORM
IS A TYPE OF
DRAGON.



SO HOW DOES A...
LINDORM... END UP OWNING
A TOY SHOP?

MOST DRAGON
SPECIES AND SUBSPECIES
HAVE HOARDING
TENDENCIES.

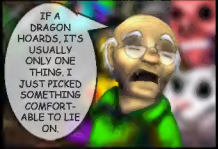
THIS ISN'T MY
HOARD!

BUT IT HELPS
YOU BUILD IT.



YOU SELL TOYS TO GET YOUR-
SELF GOLD TO HOARD?

OH NO. HIS
HOARD IS MADE
OF PLUSHIES.



IF A
DRAGON
HOARDS, IT'S
USUALLY
ONLY ONE
THING. I
JUST PICKED
SOMETHING
COMFORT-
ABLE TO LIE
ON.



YOU SHOULD SEE HIS
BEANIE BABY COL-
LECTION.

Holy crap.
Well...There
went MY child-
hood view of
dragons.



The inside of the haunted house was dark, and speakers were blasting sound effects with eerie music. A recording of a heartbeat thudded over piano notes while screeches and screams filled the background. Over the rank of artificial fog, I caught something... a scent that seized my attention, but I couldn't place it.



(C)SMG 11 Nashoba-Hostina



It was acrid, musky, and salty. Just the presence of it made my heart start to pound, and as I felt a jolt of adrenalin rush through me, I realized it was the scent of fear, very similar to the scent I caught when chasing down deer. However, I found that while part of me reacted by feeling scared myself, something in me was... very excited by the scent of something else being afraid.

As I navigated the twists and turns of the poorly lit maze, I found that my senses began to adjust... and over adjust. While it was still dark, sometimes I was able to make out the walls, even though I shouldn't have been able to by human standards. My ears hurt from the noise, even though I found myself straining in vain to hear sounds of those who had been so scared... but I couldn't even make out Maggie's footsteps behind me over the noise.



MAGGIE?
MAGGIE??



And then I realized.
She wasn't there.

Suddenly alone, the excitement I felt faded, leaving me only with a steadily intensifying chill creeping down my spine. I was on my own. Trapped in a tight, dark, maze. Part of me couldn't believe that being alone was... really bothering me. It was weird. I used to love being alone; I didn't need anyone. And yet... my mind kept going back to the other night in the woods. I kept thinking about how scared I had been... and how much my friends helped. The fear I'd felt the other night began creeping into what I felt now, even though I knew I was safe... this had to be safe, right?



Yeah. Sure. I'd thought the woods were safe too.

But then, I caught a whiff of Maggie's scent. It was kind of a mixture of dust and chicken and mountain dew. But even though I was trying to sniff Maggie out, it was difficult.



The fake fog masked details, and the smell of cold sweat clogged up my nose. I tried to follow the rank of fear, the one strong scent my panicking mind was able to hold onto... but the people who had been in here before me had been just as lost as I now was. The scent lead me in circles.



MAGGIE?!

GRZRRA...

AIEEE!

(C)SMG 11 Nashoba Hostina

Even though my instinct said to run, I was cornered. I found I couldn't work out whether I was scared or angry...

RAWR!

WHIMPER

GRRRRR

But as he lowered himself and whined... the growl in my throat subsided.

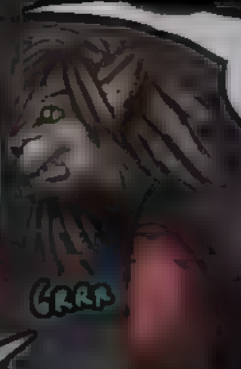
WHINE...

He wasn't a threat.. and as the panic settled, I realized what had happened I'd been set up for a scare, but something still wasn't right...

WHAT THE HELL TODD? WHY AM I ALL WOLFY?



DEFENSE
MECHANISM.
LOTS OF WEREWOLVES
SHIFT A LITTLE WHEN
THREATENED, OR WHEN
THEY FEEL STRONG
EMOTION. I FIGURED
THAT YOU WOULDN'T
BE A PROBLEM,
SINCE YOU ARE ..
YOU KNOW.



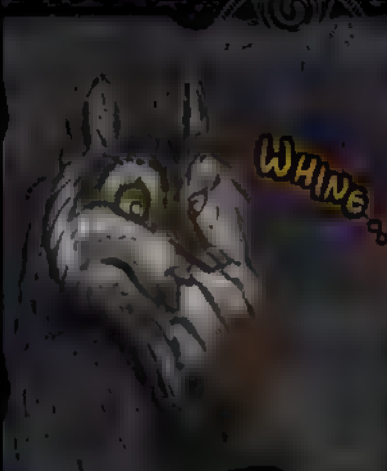
YEAH. I FIGURED
YOU WOULDN'T BE AS
LIKELY TO CHANGE
INSTINCTIVELY AND
SLICE MY NOSE LIKE
THAT ..

HMPH, THAT'S WHAT
YOU GET FOR SCARING
ME, YOU BIG JERK! WHAT
ARE YOU DOING IN HERE
ANYWAY?

A SHORT BUS
WEREWOLF?



IT'S MY JOB
JOHN HIRES ME
TO PLAY WERE-
WOLF EVERY
OTHER DAY AND
PAYS ME WITH
STEAK.



WHINE..



THAT HURT,
YOU KNOW.



DIDJA GET HER.
DIDJA GET... OR
SHE GOT YOU.

HE DISSERVED
IT TOO! MAGGIE,
IF YOU EVER PULL
A STUNT LIKE
THIS AGAIN--



-- I SWEAR
TO GOD, I'LL
MAUL YOU

TAUULT!

RHOW...



AWK! GAH,
COME BACK
FEATHERS. I
NEED YOU!

SNIFF...

SNIFLE

AW-AP...

AWK!

SNERK!

..CHV!

AH-HAH

CH-HAW!

Maggie didn't ditch me again after that. And the rest of the haunt was.. well, fun.

Some of the monsters were fake...

Others were folks in masks

And a few, like Todd, were very real, though at first some moved jerkily, like they were pretending to be robots.

However, eventually, the pathway came to an end, and we exited back into the shop. The comparatively cheery atmosphere seemed almost surreal after the haunt.

Something about it all smelled a lot like the Layline, and I honestly suspected the folks in masks were humanoid eldritch folks.

YOU KIDS HAVE FUN?

OH YES! TODD GOT FAITH, BUT SHE GOT HIM BACK

YA MUST HAVE GOTTEN PRETTY SPOOKED TO END UP LOOKING ALL BEFURRED LIKE THAT.

OH DAMN! I... URG, DO YOU HAVE A BATHROOM WHERE I CAN GO CHANGE IN WHERE NO ONE WILL SEE ME? I NEED TO GET BACK TO NORMAL BEFORE WE LEAVE

YOU KIDDIN'? LOOKIN' LIKE THAT YOU'LL FIT RIGHT IN OUT THERE.



I'M NOT SO SURE ABOUT THIS, MAGGIE



DUDE! THAT'S A GREAT, GREAAAAAT COSTUME!



UM THANKS!



COME ON, FAITH!



I THINK I OWE YOU A CANDIED APPLE. AND I KNOW A GREAT VENDOR WHO MAKES THE BEST PUMPKIN COOKIES.

THIS PLACE IS GREAT WHILE THE PARTY AT THE LAYLINE ON HALLOWEEN NIGHT IS THE BEST, DOWNTOWN MAPLEVEIW BECOMES LIKE A BIG STREET PARTY THE WHOLE WEEK LEADING UP TO HALLOWEEN

I was careful, so people didn't think anything about me was odd at all as we headed off for more friendly tricks and treats, even though my tail wagged, just a little bit.

And then came the magic night. Halloween

MAN, I LOVE HOW FOLKS THOUGHT YOU WERE DONE UP IN A FACIAL PROSTHETIC WITH PUPPETED EARS! NOW... HMM, JAY-ZUSE, I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO GO AS THIS YEAR...

I WAS THE JOKER LAST YEAR, AND I HAVE A FEW OLD COSPLAYS I COULD GO TO THE PARTY IN. I HAVE A NICE KIMONO MY MOTHER GAVE ME... MAYBE I COULD DRESS UP AS ERIC DRAVEN?

DRESS AS A GUY? WHAT ARE YOU SMOKING? YOU CAN DO BETTER THAN THAT.

HEY, I'VE CROSSPLAYED PLENTY OF TIMES. WHAT ARE YOU GOING AS, IF YOU'RE SUCH AN EXPERT?

WELL... I... DON'T REALLY HAVE A COSTUME

WHAT?! OH, WE HAVE TO FIX THIS. COSTUMES ARE MANDATORY... THE LAST ONE WHO CAME WITHOUT A COSTUME WAS DRESSED AT THE PARTY, AND YOU DON'T WANT THAT TO HAPPEN!



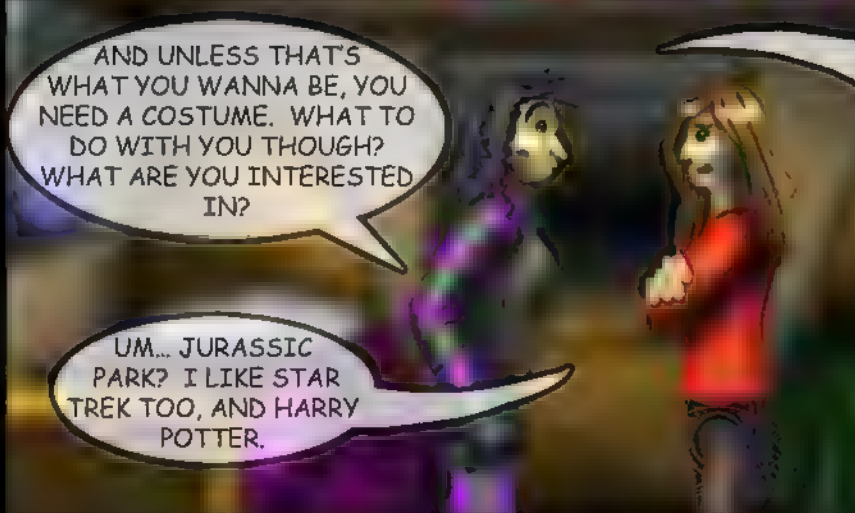
OH REALLY?

YEAH. THEY SMEARED HIS FACE WITH NUTELLA AND SOME TOILET PAPER.



WHAT THE HECK KIND OF COSTUME WAS THAT?

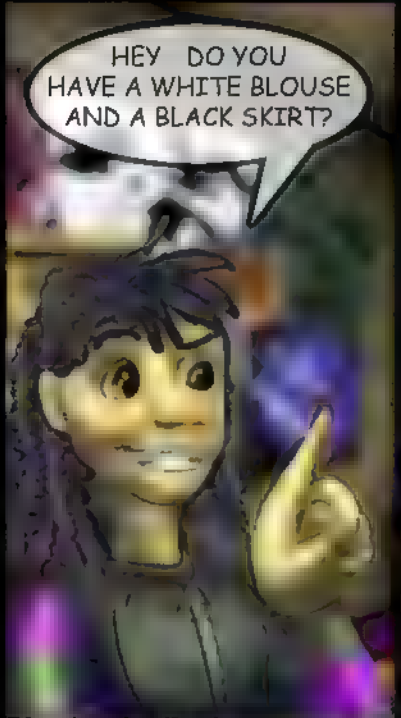
THEY DRESSED HIM AS AN ASSHOLE, FAITH.



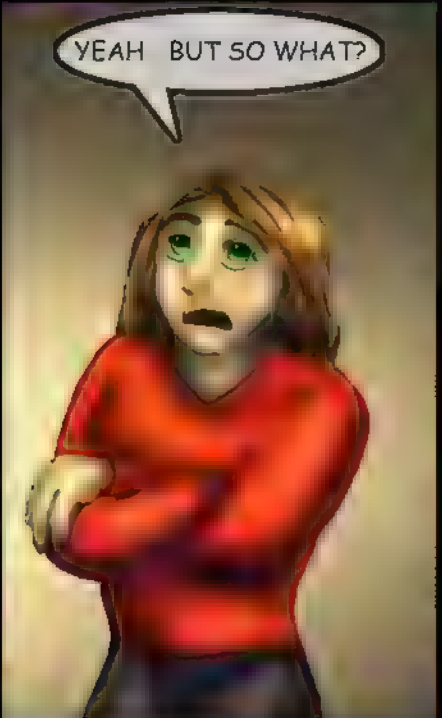
AND UNLESS THAT'S WHAT YOU WANNA BE, YOU NEED A COSTUME. WHAT TO DO WITH YOU THOUGH? WHAT ARE YOU INTERESTED IN?

UM... JURASSIC PARK? I LIKE STAR TREK TOO, AND HARRY POTTER.

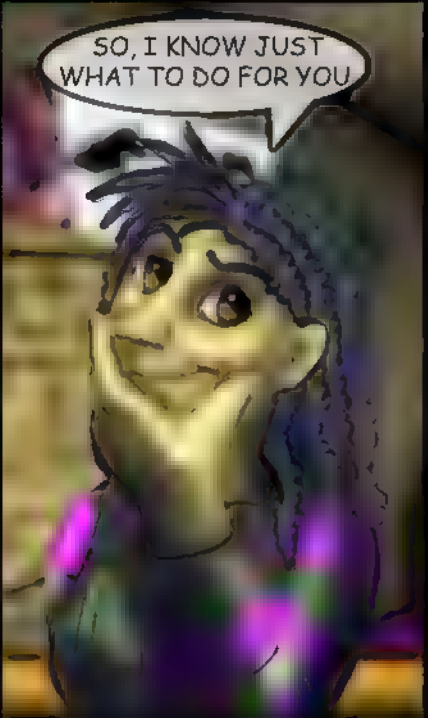
I DON'T REALLY HAVE ANYTHING ALONG THOSE LINES. HMMM... YOU'D MAKE A GREAT WORGEN IF I HAD THE RIGHT ARMOR... UGH, THIS IS TRICKY.



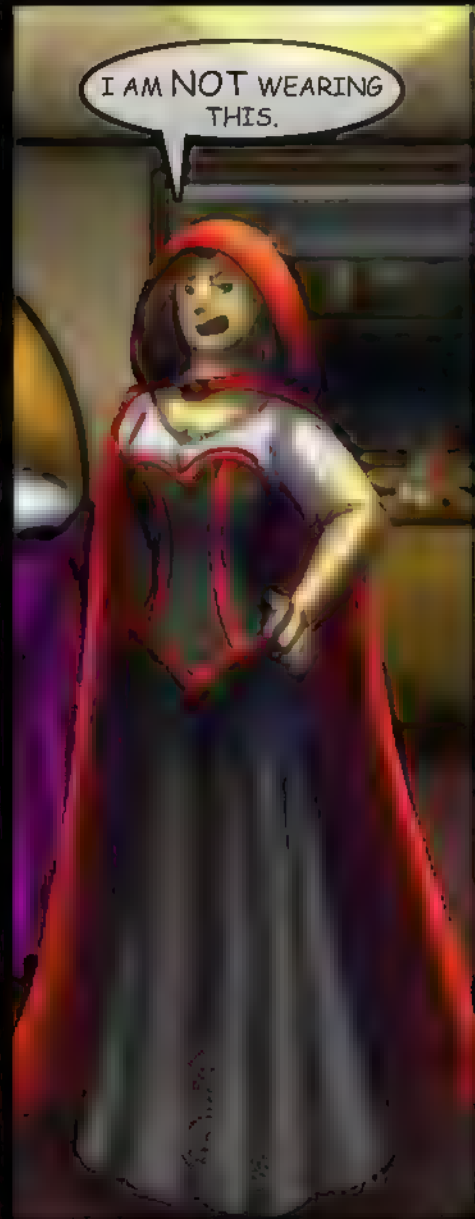
HEY DO YOU HAVE A WHITE BLOUSE AND A BLACK SKIRT?



YEAH BUT SO WHAT?



SO, I KNOW JUST WHAT TO DO FOR YOU



I AM NOT WEARING THIS.



OH COME ON, YOU LOOK GREAT!

YOU HAVE GOT TO BE KIDDING ME. YOU CAN'T DO ANY BETTER THAN LITTLE RED RIDING HOOD?

WELL, YOU AREN'T GOING TO GET ANYTHING BETTER THE DAY OF HALLOW-EEN.



...I COULD WEAR BROWN AND GRAB SOME BRANCHES FROM OUTSIDE AND BE A TREE

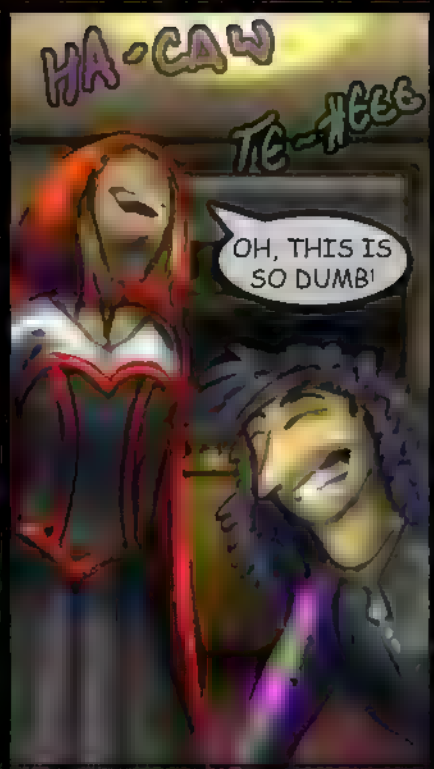
I THINK LITTLE RED RIDING HOOD IS SCARIER THAN A TREE



WHOMPING WILLOWS ARE SCARY.



ENTS ARE BETTER



HA-CAW
TE-HEE

OH, THIS IS SO DUMB!

At dusk it was time to go

HEY, YOU'RE FAITH'S
LITTLE CAT FRIEND, HUH?
WANNA BE MY BLACK
CAT TONIGHT?

The path from the university to
downtown wasn't that long really. It
wound through the woods, which were a
protected area used by the bio stu-
dents, so it was all a scenic and lovely
walk on most days.

The only exception was that about halfway through the woods,
there was a cemetery. According to my professors at Mapleview
University, about a hundred years ago, the land the school rests
on was the home of the Goodfellows, some old rich family, before
they built a school here. The cemetery was the family grave-
yard, and was left mostly untouched after the college was put in.
These days, the only burials that took place there were of those
who were important to the university. Someone was buried just
the other day, adding to the place's creepiness

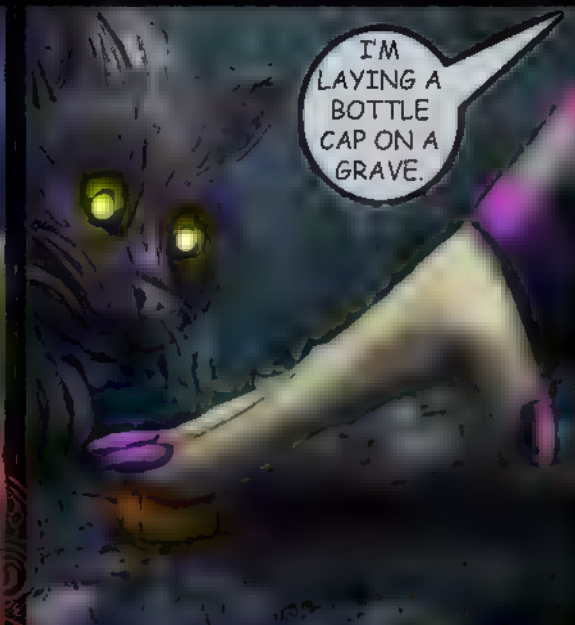
However, the cemetery wasn't always that
well cared for, and it was overgrown, with
broken and leaning headstones. Strangely
enough, people seemed to prefer it that
way... even decorating it for Halloween.
During the day, it was open to visitors... but
at night, the gates were always locked.

Except for tonight





MAGGIE... MAGGIE,
IT SMELLS BAD IN HERE.
LIKE ROADKILL. WHAT
ARE YOU DOING
ANYWAY?



I'M
LAYING A
BOTTLE
CAP ON A
GRAVE.

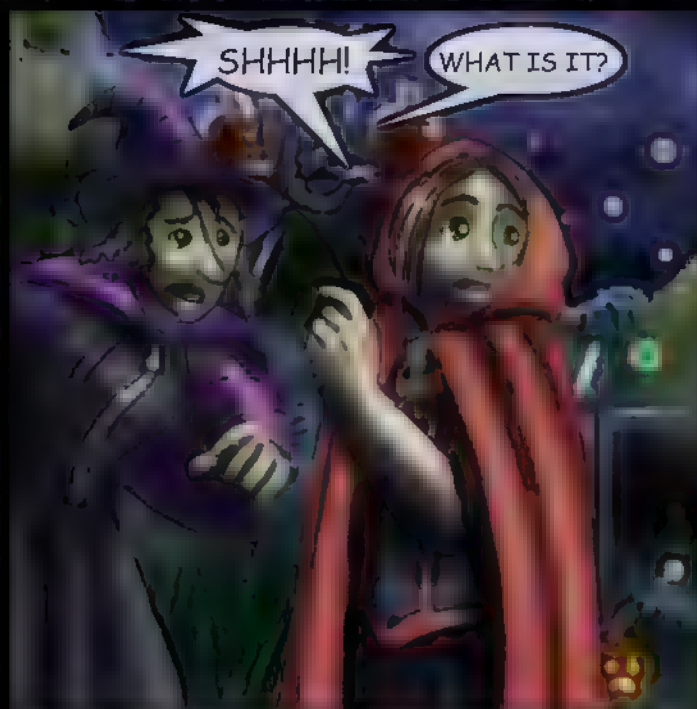


WHEN I
WAS A KID,
URBAN LEGEND
SAID THAT IF YOU
LAY A BOTTLE CAP
ON A GRAVE, IT
KEEPS THE DEAD
FROM RISING. I
THINK IT'S SUP-
POSED TO BE A
METAL ONE
THOUGH.

WHAT DO YOU HAVE
BOTTLE CAPS FOR?

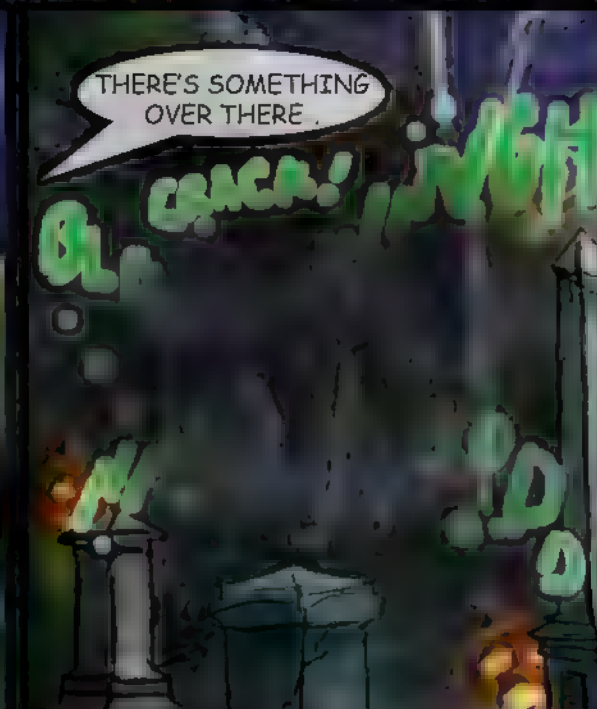
OH, FOR THE LITTLE
PRIZE CODES ON THE INSIDE.
I HAVE ALL SORTS OF THINGS
IN MY POCKETS AND—

CRUNCH



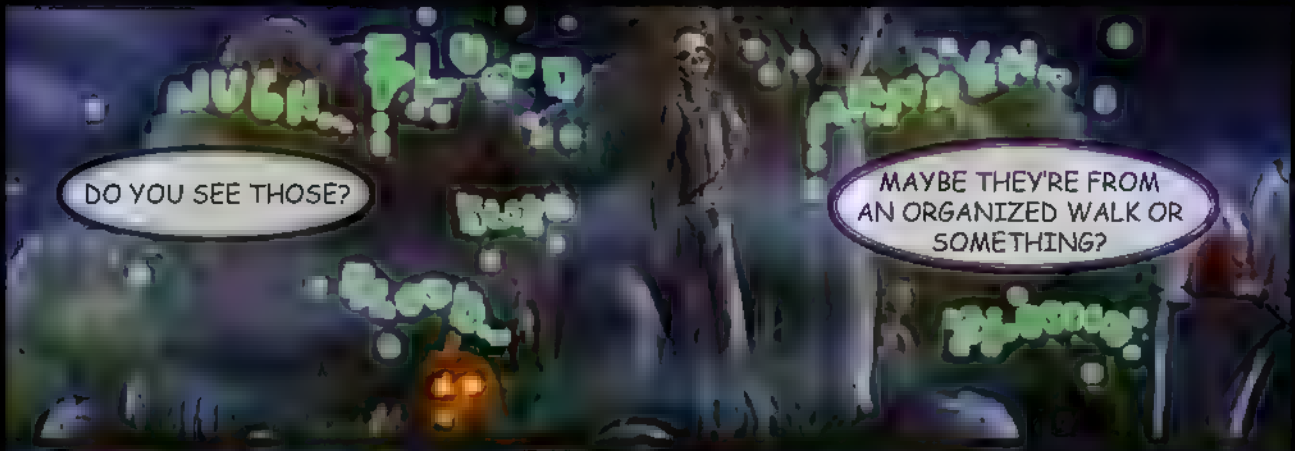
SHHHH!

WHAT IS IT?



THERE'S SOMETHING
OVER THERE

CRACK!



DO YOU SEE THOSE?

MAYBE THEY'RE FROM AN ORGANIZED WALK OR SOMETHING?



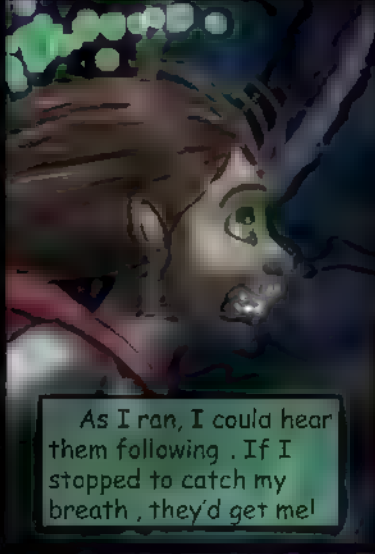
MAGGIE?



JAYZEUS...
FAITH, RUN!
RUN NOW!

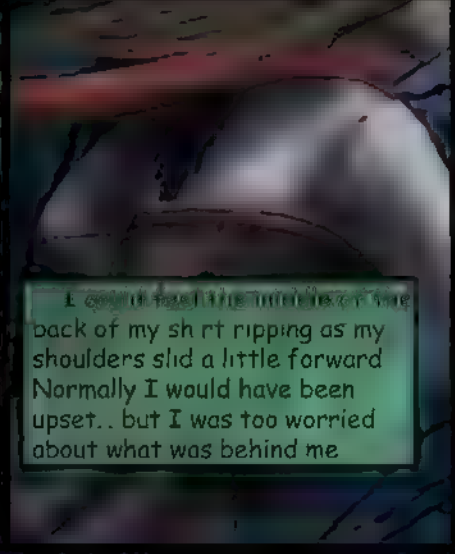
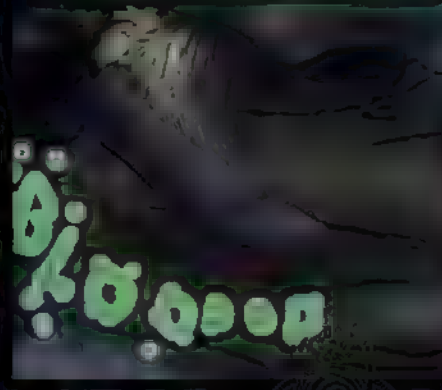


YOU
PEOPLE TOLD
ME THERE
WERE NO
SUCH
THINGS AS
ZOMBIES!

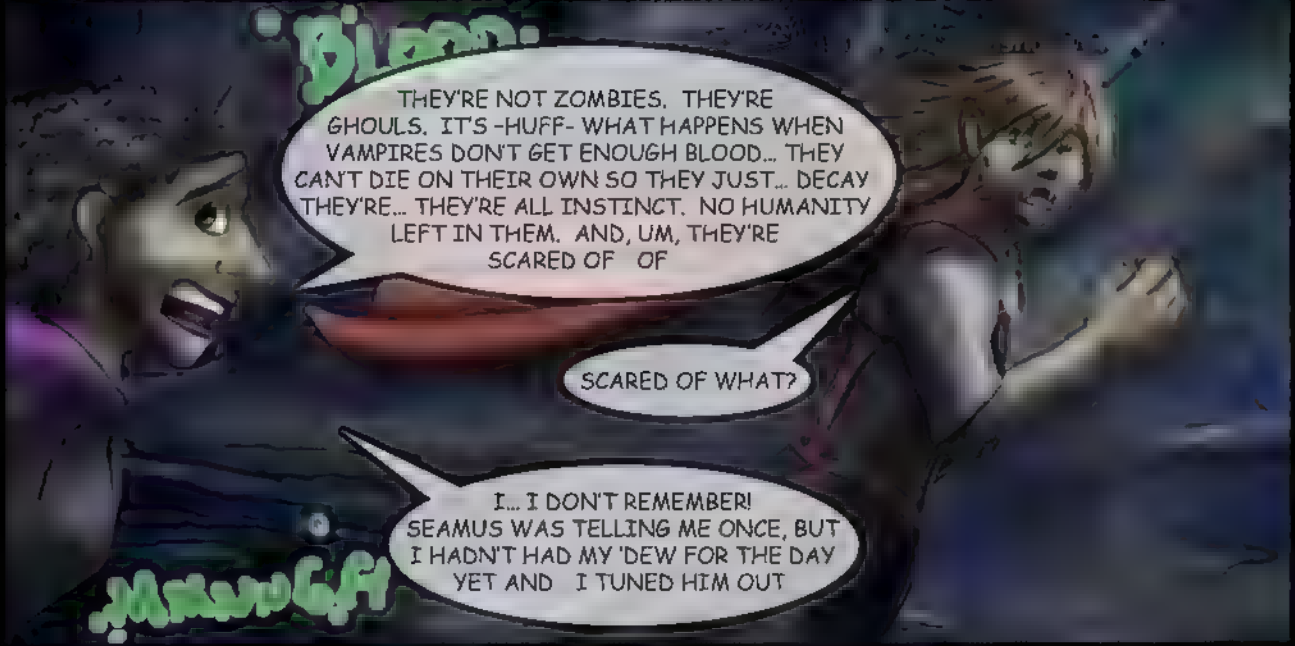


As I ran, I could hear them following . If I stopped to catch my breath , they'd get me!

I didn't dare look back, and as my heart thudded in my chest, I felt bits of me start to change. I found myself rising onto the balls of my feet .



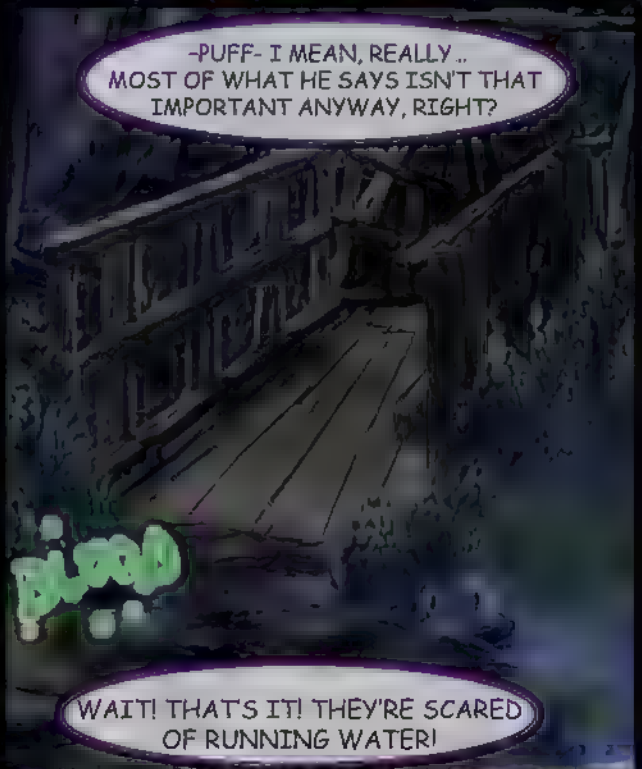
I could feel the intensity of the back of my shirt ripping as my shoulders slid a little forward. Normally I would have been upset.. but I was too worried about what was behind me



THEY'RE NOT ZOMBIES. THEY'RE GHOULS. IT'S -HUFF- WHAT HAPPENS WHEN VAMPIRES DON'T GET ENOUGH BLOOD... THEY CAN'T DIE ON THEIR OWN SO THEY JUST... DECAY THEY'RE... THEY'RE ALL INSTINCT. NO HUMANITY LEFT IN THEM. AND, UM, THEY'RE SCARED OF OF

SCARED OF WHAT?

I... I DON'T REMEMBER! SEAMUS WAS TELLING ME ONCE, BUT I HADN'T HAD MY 'DEW FOR THE DAY YET AND I TUNED HIM OUT



-PUFF- I MEAN, REALLY .. MOST OF WHAT HE SAYS ISN'T THAT IMPORTANT ANYWAY, RIGHT?

WAIT! THAT'S IT! THEY'RE SCARED OF RUNNING WATER!



WE'RE -PANT- SAFE .. WE'VE GOT TO GET TO THE LAYLINE AND GET HELP!

WHAT WILL THEY DO ONCE THEY REALIZE THEY CAN'T GET US?

THEY'LL GIVE UP AND LOOK FOR SOMETHING ELSE WITH BLOOD IN IT TO EAT



YOU MEAN, IF WE STAY HERE ON THE BRIDGE, OR IF WE LEAVE THEM THEY MIGHT WANDER OFF AND HURT SOMEONE?

IF WE STAY, THEY MIGHT HURT US!

From the very beginning, I had been running away from what scared me, even if only metaphorically. When I was Bitten, I think I told myself it was an animal attack so I didn't have to cope with what had really happened. When I first became a werewolf, I did the same thing, pretending it wasn't real. When confronted by the strangeness of the layline, and the unfamiliarity of friendship, I eventually retreated to my dorm. And when facing a hunter, I ran around in panicked circles.



What if someone had been there when I was first bitten, and they had run away instead of intervening? What if they had seen, or heard me and yet they abandoned me to my fate? Did I want to be that kind of person? Did I want to keep running away forever?



No. This was MY turf. These... these bone-heads didn't belong here.



I'M STAYING. I'M TIRED OF LETTING ALL OF THIS WEIRD CRAP MESS WITH MY LIFE, AND I CAN'T LET THESE THINGS RUIN SOMEONE ELSE'S LIFE LIKE THE ONE WHO BIT ME MESSED AROUND WITH MINE. WHAT ELSE DO I NEED TO KNOW ABOUT GHOULS?

I... I DON'T REMEMBER! UM... DON'T BITE THEM AND DON'T LET THEM BITE YOU?

WHY?



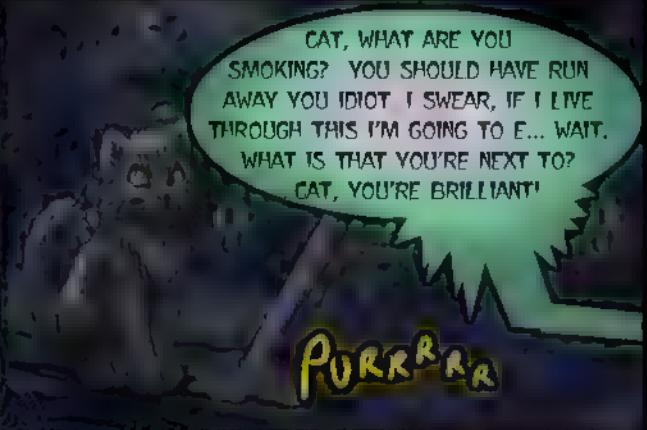
DIDN'T YOU HEAR ME? I DON'T KNOW! IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN FROM A MOVIE... JUST... BE CAREFUL, AND MAKE SURE YOU HAVE A CLEAR ROUT TO THE WATER. BUT ONCE YOU'RE PAST THEIR REACH, THEY'LL WANDER OFF. I DO REMEMBER THAT MUCH.

OKAY, OKAY SURE. NOW GO GET EVERY ONE!



OH MAN, HERE THEY COME... OKAY... NO BITING... SO I CAN CLAW... BUT HOW CAN I CLAW THEM WITHOUT BEING BITTEN? OH... OH MAN, MAYBE I DIDN'T THINK THIS THROUGH WELL ENOUGH...

MROW!



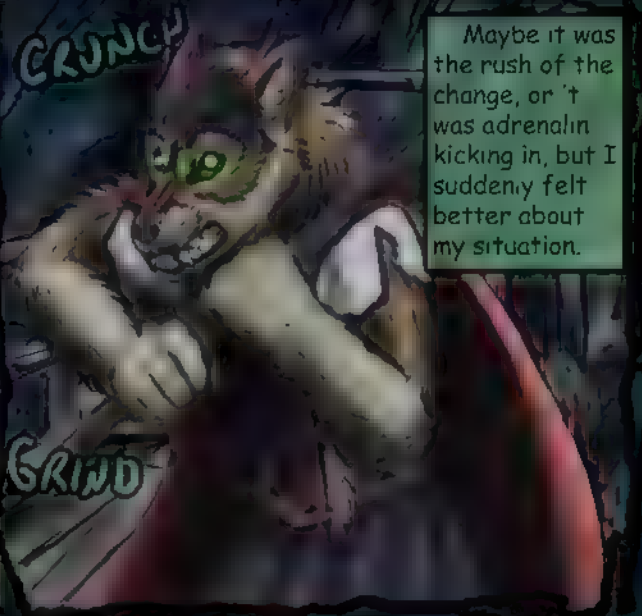
CAT, WHAT ARE YOU SMOKING? YOU SHOULD HAVE RUN AWAY YOU IDIOT I SWEAR, IF I LIVE THROUGH THIS I'M GOING TO E... WAIT. WHAT IS THAT YOU'RE NEXT TO? CAT, YOU'RE BRILLIANT!

PURRRRR

As I yanked the rusted, nasty iron fence pole out of the ground, I was reminded of being in baseball as a kid. I wasn't too bad at it and, as I felt it in my hands er claws, it felt good Right somehow



GNCH

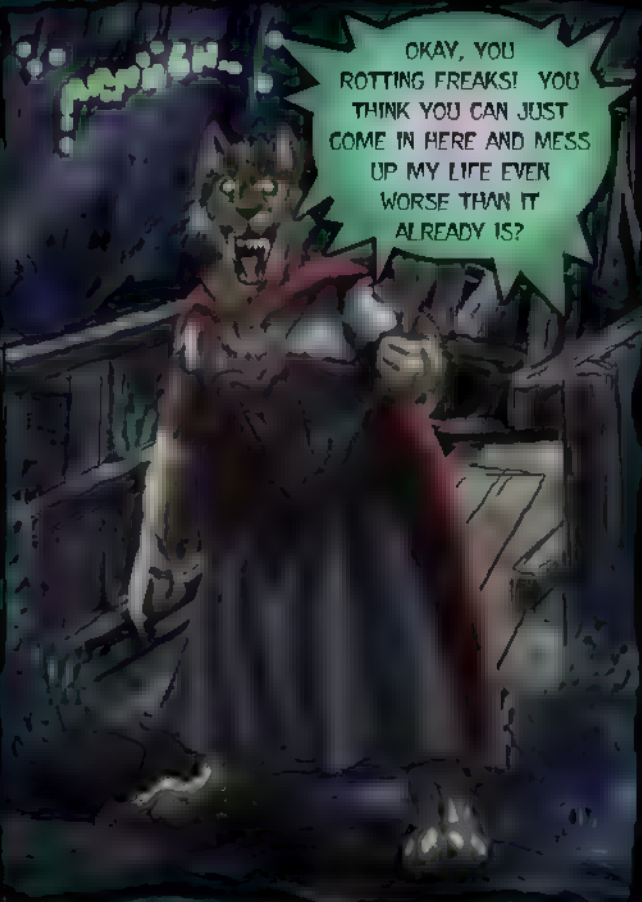


CRUNCH

Maybe it was the rush of the change, or it was adrenalin kicking in, but I suddenly felt better about my situation.

GRIND

CRACK



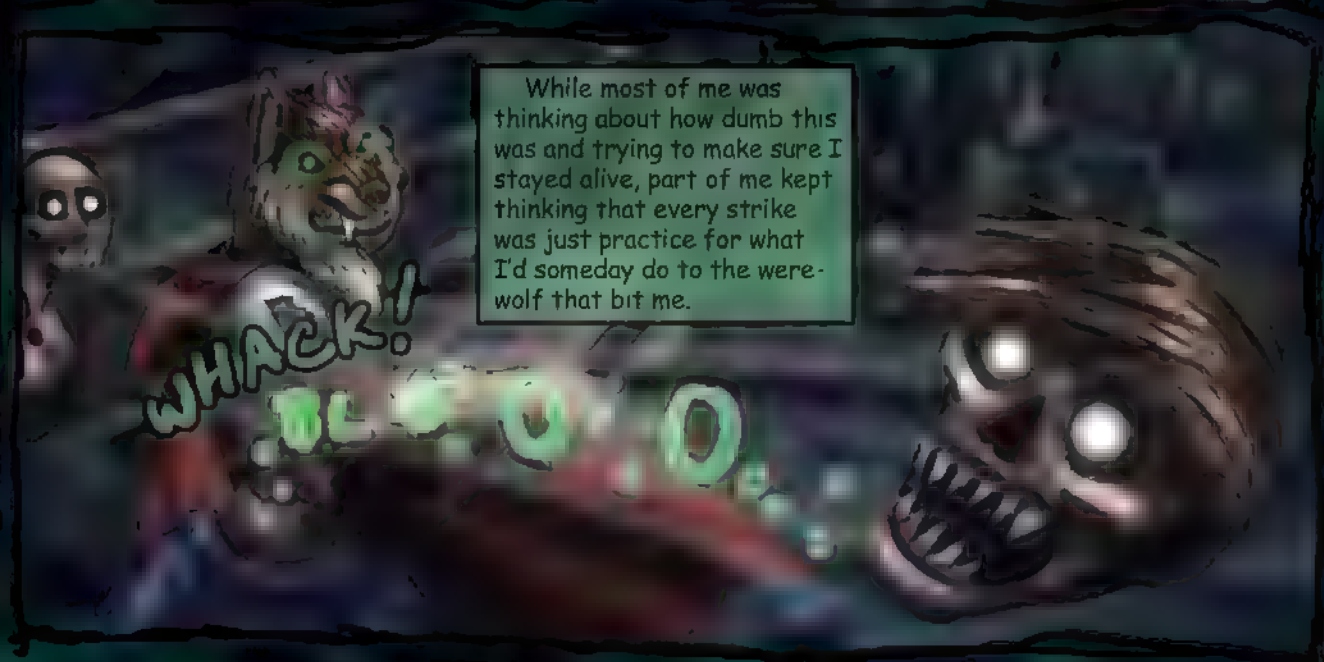
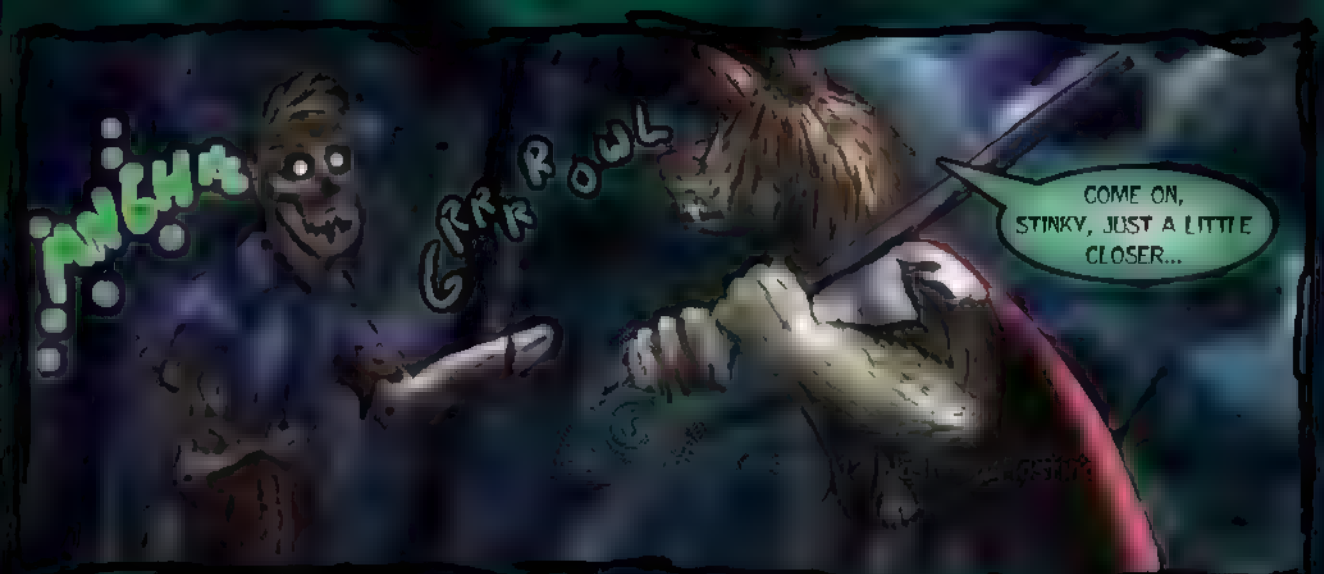
OKAY, YOU ROTTING FREAKS! YOU THINK YOU CAN JUST COME IN HERE AND MESS UP MY LIFE EVEN WORSE THAN IT ALREADY IS?

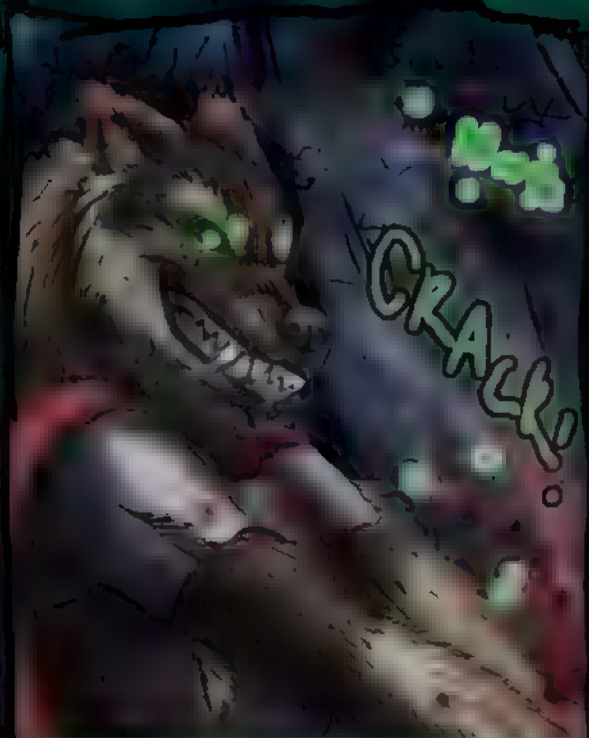


MY LIFE HAS BEEN SCARY AND MESSED UP SINCE FREAKS LIKE YOU CAME INTO IT, AND I AM DONE WITH THIS!

BLOOD!

I'M NOT GOING TO LET SOMETHING LIKE YOU MESS UP ANYONE ELSE'S LIVES ON MY TURF... AND WHILE ALL OF THIS WEIRD CRAP HAS ALREADY HAPPENED TO ME, THIS IS MY LIFE DAMN IT, AND I'M TAKING IT BACK!

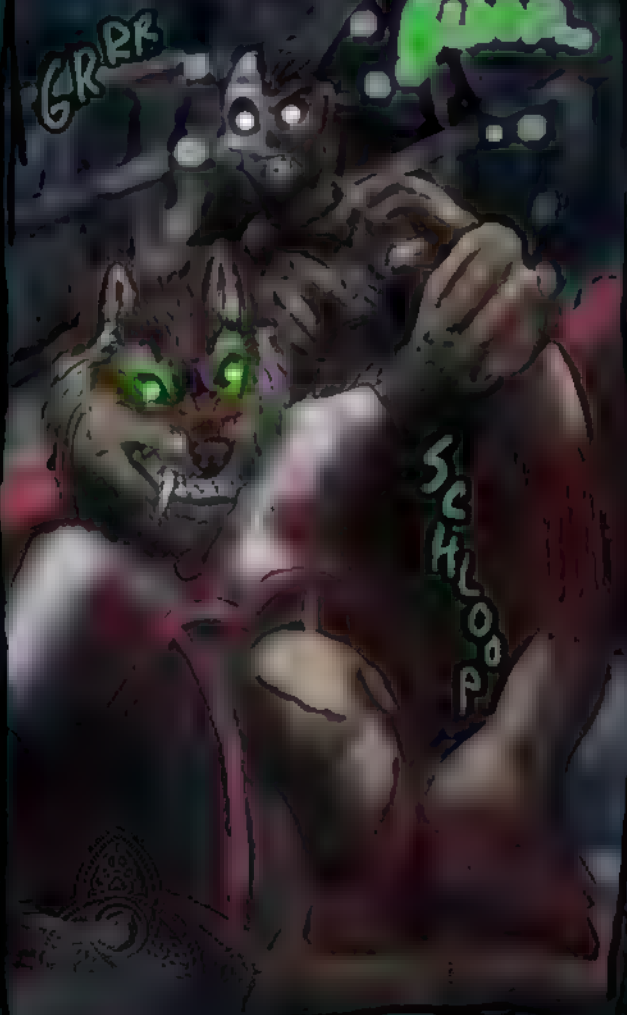




CRACK

Had these been, you know, normal people, this would have been awful. But these were threats to myself and others. I was protecting my friends and my home, and that felt so... so RIGHT. Like I was born to do this. But as I fought, I began to feel so conflicted.. Part of me felt inclined toward using the rusty pole, while the rest of me wanted nothing more than to drop it and go at them with my teeth and claws. Though Maggie warned me not to bite them, I wanted to do to them what I did to deer: leap upon them and rip them open.

The conflicting urges were distracting



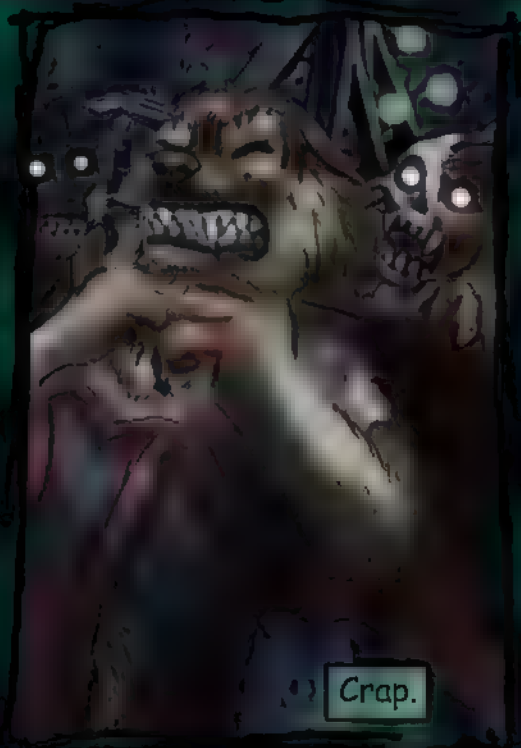
GRRR

SCHELOOP



GAATH!

Tossing it



Crap.



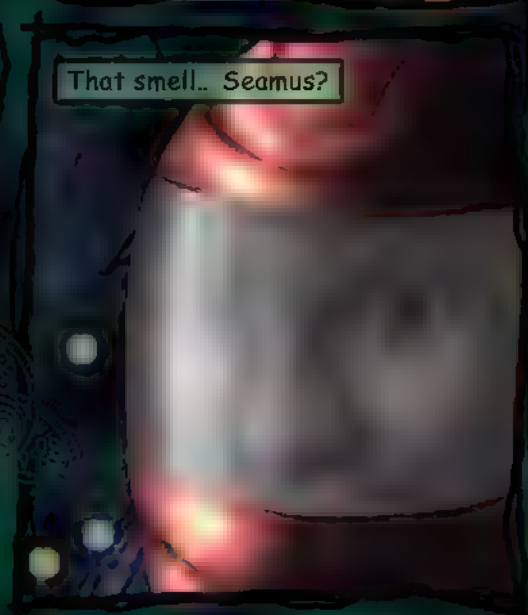
RRRR

RRRUUMBLE



CRUNCH!

That smell.. Seamus?



Seamus rides a motorcycle?

And has a crossbow?



THWOCH!

He's told me about every boring informational thing in the world, but he left out all of the interesting stuff?!What the hell?!

THUD THUD THUD



GLAD TO SEE
YOU MADE IT,
FATTIE

THUD

THUD

THUD

THUD

LEROOOOOY
JEEENKINSSSI



COME ON, YOU KIDS, WE
OUTNUMBER THEM NOW!

TAKE ITS HEAD
OFF, MIKE, TAKE
ITS HEAD OFF!



THUD THUD THUD

RAWA!

When you think of monsters battling , monsters, you picture epic, drawn out battles... but that's not how it is, in real life, I guess. Truth is, once everyone else arrived, it was over incredibly fast.

I AM NOT
CLEANING THAT
UP.

SEAMUS!
SEAMUS...
THANKS. FOR
HELPING
ME.

I DIDN'T
REALIZE IT WAS
YOU AT FIRST...
I JUST... NEVER
PICTURED YOU
RIDING A
MOTORCYCLE

IT'S SAFER
FOR EVERYONE
ELSE IF I DO.
AND BY THE WAY,
SINCE GHOULS,
WHILE NO LONGER
VAMPIRES, ARE VAM-
PIRIC IN ORIGIN AND
GNAW ON FRESH
BODIES TO GET THE
BLOOD FROM THEM,
VAMPIRE KILLING
METHODS, SUCH AS
USING A WOODEN
WEAPON, MIGHT BE
MORE EFFECTIVE
THAN THAT IRON
BAR ON THE
GROUND.

OH... I GUESS THAT
MAKES SENSE.

I GOT LUCKY.

SEAMUS? HOW
IS IT YOU'RE ALMOST
ALWAYS LATE FOR TEACHING ME
ABOUT ELDRITCH STUFF, OR
VANISH IN THE MIDDLE OF IT,
BUT TONIGHT YOU SHOW UP
RIGHT ON TIME?



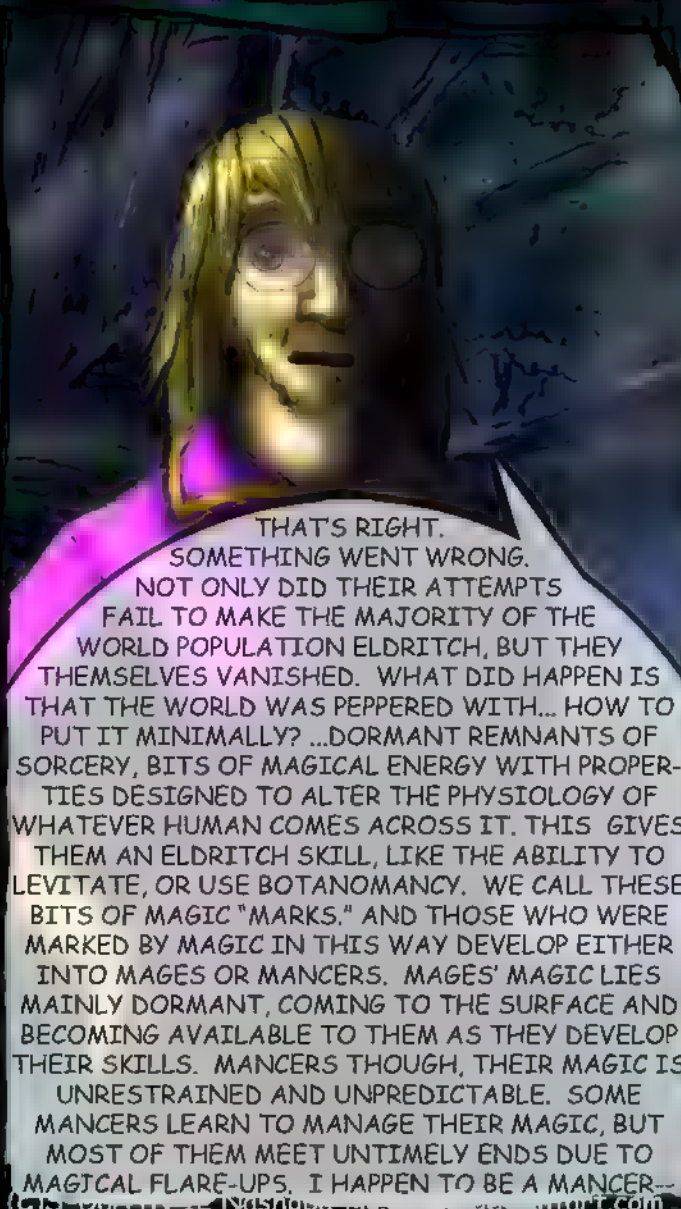
DO YOU REMEMBER ME TELLING YOU ONCE THAT THE WIZARDS WERE EXTINCT, BUT THEY HAD LEFT LEGACIES.. AND THAT TWO OF THEM WERE THE MAGES AND THE MANCERS?

ER... KIND OF?



WELL, WHILE HUMAN FOLKLORE SAYS NOTHING OF IT, ELDRITCH LEGEND SAYS THAT WIZARDS GATHERED TOGETHER TO PERFORM A SPELL THAT WOULD ALTER THE WORLD TO A POINT WHERE MUNDANE FOLKS WOULD OFTEN BECOME MAGICAL THEMSELVES. THE THOUGHT WAS, THAT IF MOST PEOPLE WERE OF THE ELDRITCH SORT, THEN THAT WOULD BECOME THE NORM AND IT WOULD STOP THE SLAUGHTER OF MUNDANE AND ELDRITCH FOLK ALIKE.

THAT THAT DIDN'T HAPPEN.



THAT'S RIGHT. SOMETHING WENT WRONG. NOT ONLY DID THEIR ATTEMPTS FAIL TO MAKE THE MAJORITY OF THE WORLD POPULATION ELDRITCH, BUT THEY THEMSELVES VANISHED. WHAT DID HAPPEN IS THAT THE WORLD WAS PEPPERED WITH... HOW TO PUT IT MINIMALLY? ...DORMANT REMNANTS OF SORCERY, BITS OF MAGICAL ENERGY WITH PROPERTIES DESIGNED TO ALTER THE PHYSIOLOGY OF WHATEVER HUMAN COMES ACROSS IT. THIS GIVES THEM AN ELDRITCH SKILL, LIKE THE ABILITY TO LEVITATE, OR USE BOTANOMANCY. WE CALL THESE BITS OF MAGIC "MARKS," AND THOSE WHO WERE MARKED BY MAGIC IN THIS WAY DEVELOP EITHER INTO MAGES OR MANCERS. MAGES' MAGIC LIES MAINLY DORMANT, COMING TO THE SURFACE AND BECOMING AVAILABLE TO THEM AS THEY DEVELOP THEIR SKILLS. MANCERS THOUGH, THEIR MAGIC IS UNRESTRAINED AND UNPREDICTABLE. SOME MANCERS LEARN TO MANAGE THEIR MAGIC, BUT MOST OF THEM MEET UNTIMELY ENDS DUE TO MAGICAL FLARE-UPS. I HAPPEN TO BE A MANCER--



OOKAY. SO THEN, COULD YOU BRIEFLY TELL ME WHAT YOUR UH, MARK IS THEN?



I'M A CHRONOMANCER.

...HUH?

I'M A MANCER THAT DOESN'T AGE, AND CAN JUMP THROUGH TIME. ONE MOMENT, I WAS PARKED ON THE SIDE OF THE ROAD AT NOON, I FELT THE JUMP COMING ON, AND THEN, IT WAS NIGHT AND I HEARD THE COMMOTION IN THE WOODS. THAT'S HOW I GOT HERE FIRST.

THAT'S SO COOL! YOU CAN DO NEAT STUFF WITHOUT EVEN BEING A MONSTER OR ANYTHING!

I WISH I THOUGHT SO.

WHY DON'T YOU?

EVEN THOUGH I'VE BEEN AT IT FOR LONGER THAN I CARE TO REMEMBER... I CAN'T CONTROL WHEN I JUMP THROUGH TIME, AND WHEN I DO JUMP, IT'S ONLY FORWARD.

NO WONDER YOU KNOW SO MUCH; YOU'VE BEEN AT IT FOR SO LONG. SEAMUS, I... I'M SORRY, I...

SEAMUS?

WAIT... HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN A... MANCER?

I DON'T KNOW EXACTLY. WHEN YOU MISS CHUNKS OF TIME, YOU CAN'T TELL HOW OLD YOU REALLY ARE. BUT WHEN I GOT MY MARK, I UNWILLINGLY LEFT MY WIFE AND SON... IN THE SIXTEEN HUNDREDS. ONE MOMENT, I WAS STANDING AT MY FRONT DOOR... THE NEXT THE BUILDING WAS GONE. BEFORE I COULD FIND OUT WHAT HAD HAPPENED... I JUMPED AGAIN. I'VE SINCE SPENT MY LIFE TRYING TO WORK OUT HOW TO SCIENTIFICALLY ALTER MY MAGICAL ABILITY OR USE SOMEONE ELSE'S ABILITY TO SEND ME BACK SO I COULD SEE MY WIFE AND SON AGAIN, EVEN IF ONLY FOR A MOMENT, SO I COULD TELL THEM HOW MUCH I LOVE THEM, AND SAY GOODBYE.

SEAMUS?



WE'RE ABOUT DONE
CLEANING UP THE MESS. I'M SO
GLAD YOU'RE ALRIGHT

GAOTH,
DID SEAMUS
JUST...?

HE'LL SEE YOU ANOTHER TIME,
FAITH. HE'LL PROBABLY POP BACK
IN A HALF HOUR OR SO.

HE SAVED ME...

HE TENDS TO
BE PREPARED FOR
JUST ABOUT ANYTHING.
THAT'S PROBABLY WHY
HE'S LASTED THIS LONG.
BUT YOU MIGHT HAVE
SAVED SOME PEOPLE TOO,
BY KEEPING THOSE
DEGENERATE BLOODSUCK-
ERS BUSY AND WHERE
WE COULD GET
TO THEM.

YOU KNOW, FAITH, A LONG TIME
AGO, PETER STUBBE, A GERMAN WEREWOLF,
WAS EXECUTED ON HALLOWEEN BECAUSE
HE'D KILLED AND EATEN SEVERAL PEOPLE.
THINGS LIKE THAT GIVE WEREWOLVES
A BAD NAME.

BUT TONIGHT, YOU
PROBABLY SAVED A BUNCH
OF PEOPLE... IT'S A SHAME
NONE OF THEM WILL EVER
KNOW

YEAH, YOU WERE
SO BADASS!

AHEM, ER.
'BADASS' OR
NOT, YOU'RE
NOW MY FAVOR-
ITE WEREWOLF.
NO WONDER
TODD LIKES YOU
SO MUCH.

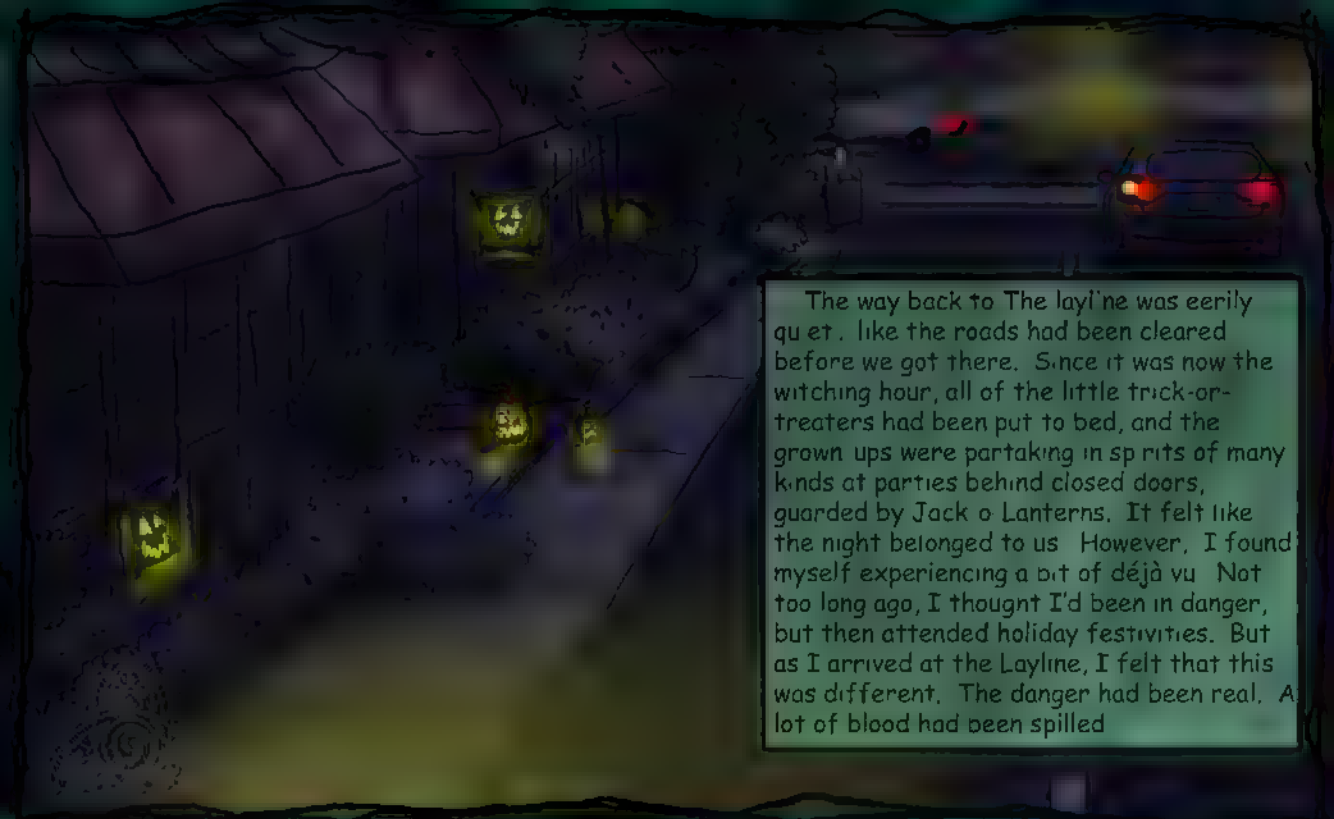
BUT I'M
THE ONLY KNOWN
WEREWOLF IN THE
AREA...

NO I WASNT.
RESIDES, YOU GUYS CAME
AND SAVED ME. I JUST DID
WHAT I WISH SOMEONE HAD
DONE FOR ME...

AND TODD LIKES
EVERYONE LACKING A Y
CHROMOSOME.

WHERE IS HE
ANYWAY? I STILL HAVEN'T
THANKED HIM PROPERLY FOR
THE OTHER NIGHT.

I SENT HIM TO
SEARCH THE PERIME-
TER OF THE FOREST
FOR MORE GHOULS,
JUST IN CASE..



The way back to The Layline was eerily quiet. Like the roads had been cleared before we got there. Since it was now the witching hour, all of the little trick-or-treaters had been put to bed, and the grown ups were partaking in spirits of many kinds at parties behind closed doors, guarded by Jack o' Lanterns. It felt like the night belonged to us. However, I found myself experiencing a bit of déjà vu. Not too long ago, I thought I'd been in danger, but then attended holiday festivities. But as I arrived at the Layline, I felt that this was different. The danger had been real. A lot of blood had been spilled.



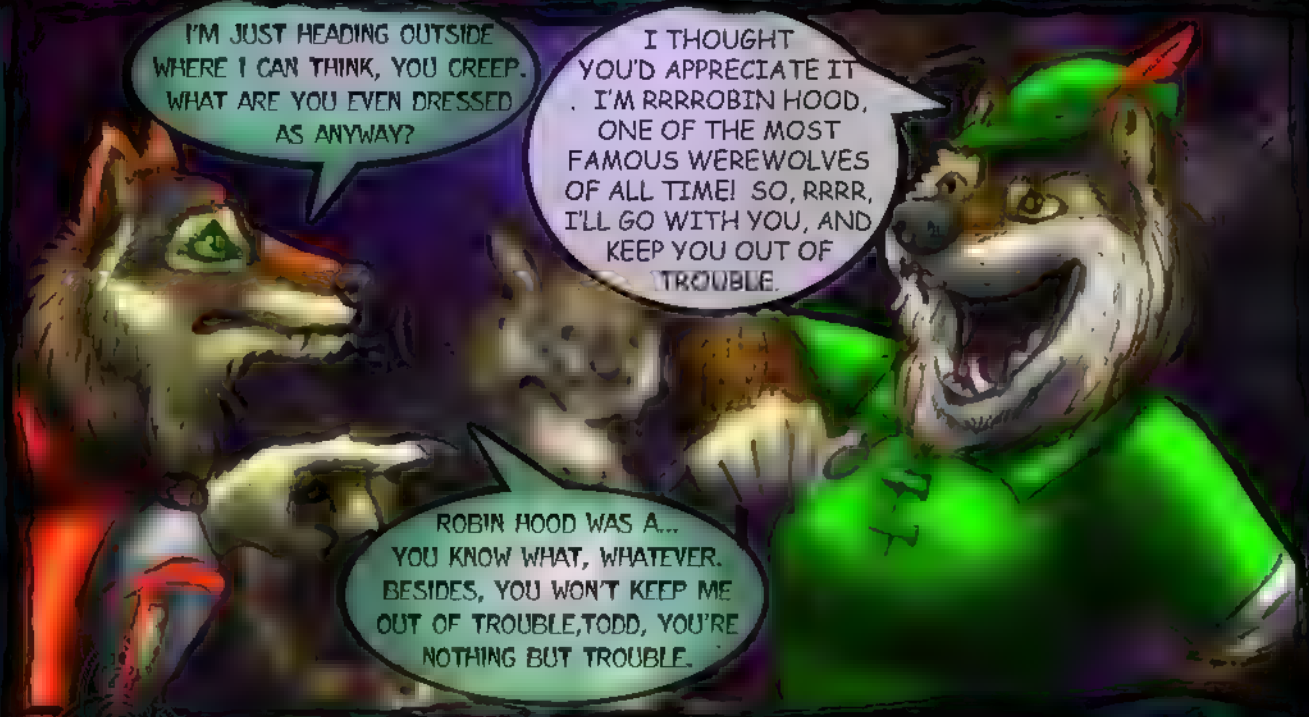
By the time everyone got to the Layline for our party, the atmosphere was jubilant? I think that's the right word. There was lots of talk about eliminating the 'vampiric, ghoulish' that had come by, but I kept finding myself thinking about something that Seamus had said once about vampires not being all that bad. What if they had been like me? What if they had never wanted to be vampires, couldn't cut it, and degenerated into ghouls?



I mean, they were pretty brainless, but they hadn't always been. While everyone else seemed to take the whole thing lightly... it seemed scarier and scarier the more thought I gave it. I started wondering about whether or not the same kind of thing could happen to werewolves. There was so much that I still didn't know. I couldn't stay. I had to get out... get someplace quiet, where I could think.



HELLO LITTLE GIRL, WHAT'S YOUR RUSH?



I'M JUST HEADING OUTSIDE
WHERE I CAN THINK, YOU CREEP.
WHAT ARE YOU EVEN DRESSED
AS ANYWAY?

I THOUGHT
YOU'D APPRECIATE IT
. I'M RRRROBIN HOOD,
ONE OF THE MOST
FAMOUS WEREWOLVES
OF ALL TIME! SO, RRRR,
I'LL GO WITH YOU, AND
KEEP YOU OUT OF
TROUBLE.

ROBIN HOOD WAS A...
YOU KNOW WHAT, WHATEVER.
BESIDES, YOU WON'T KEEP ME
OUT OF TROUBLE, TODD, YOU'RE
NOTHING BUT TROUBLE.

BUT YOU SURE HELP ME OUT WHEN I NEED
IT... THANK YOU. YOU ANNOY ME SOMETIMES,
BUT I REALLY APPRECIATE WHAT YOU DID FOR
ME THE OTHER NIGHT, AND CHECKING FOR
MORE GHOULS EARLIER TONIGHT... DID
YOU FIND ANY MORE?

NO. THEY USUALLY
STICK TOGETHERRR
WHEN THEY FIND ONE
ANOTHER.

WELL, WHAT WERE THEY
DOING HERE, ANYWAY?

THE VAMPIRES
ARE TRYING TO MOVE
IN ON THIS TERRI-
TORY.

WHAT?

THE FAR EDGE OF THOSE WOODS IS
THE EDGE OF FAE TERRITORY HERE THAT IS THE ONLY
ONE OF MY BORDERS WITH VAMPIRES REIGNING ON THE OTHER SIDE.
THAT'S WHY I LIVE HERE, SO I CAN BE CLOSE BY OBVIOUSLY, THEY MADE
SOME QUICK GHOULS BY TURNING MORTALS AND STARVING THEM, AND
PUSHED THEM OVER HERE TO SEE HOW WEAK OUR DEFENSES
ARE. THAT'S THE ONLY OPTION.



GAOTH! IT IS HALLO-FREAKING-WEEN, YOU KNOW!

FAITH JUST WENT THROUGH A LOT.



THE LAST TIME FAITH NEEDS IS YOUR FREAKING OUT ABOUT THE VAMPS ACROSS THE WOODS.

YOU DISLIKE THEM. WE GET IT. BUT WHAT FAITH NEEDS IS...



A HANDFUL OF PIXIE STICKS, A MOUNTAIN DEW, AND SOME PARTYING!



MAYBE YOU'D LIKE A DANCE, FAITH. OR SOMETHING MORE... EXERTIVE? CARE TO DO THE, RRRR, MONSTERRRR MASH WITH ME?

EW! NO.



EW? WHY EW? I THINK I SMELL PRRRETTY SEXY TONIGHT, IN SPITE OF RUNNING ALL OVER THE WOODS.



I, I MEAN, IT'S NOT LIKE I'M NOT GRATEFUL TO YOU. IT'S, UH... NICE OF YOU TO OFFER, AND YOU WORK HARD FOR EVERYONE, AND HELPED SAVE ME THE OTHER DAY IN THE WOODS, BUT IT'S JUST...

YOU'RE A WOLF... AND I'M HUMAN.



NORMALLY, I'M HUMAN. AND... AND I DON'T LIKE TO DANCE. THANK YOU FOR EVERYTHING, TODD, BUT I HATE DANCING HONESTLY.



WELL, GAOTH SAID THAT THE PIANO KEYS ARE MADE WITH ENCHANTED BONE. THE BONES USED TO BE TOSSED AND HOW THEY FELL WOULD INDICATE A PERSON'S TRUE BEING OR INTENT. WELL, GAOTH WANTED A WAY OF EVALUATING PEOPLE IN A WAY EVERYONE COULD UNDERSTAND... SO HE HAD THE PIANO MADE. WHEN SOMEONE PUTS THEIR HANDS ON THE KEYS, THEY'RE COMPELLED TO PLAY SOMETHING THAT REVEALS THEIR TRUE SELF.



Nashoba Hostina

HAVE YOU EVER PLAYED IT?

SURE.

WHAT DID YOU PLAY?

THE IMPERIAL DEATH MARCH.



DYLAN, JUST BECAUSE WE HADN'T BEEN IN TOUCH FOR A WHILE, I STILL KNOW WHEN YOU'RE LYING... COME ON, TELL ME!



I DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU'D CALL IT... BUT IT IMPRESSED GAOTH. AFTER THAT, HE TOOK ME IN, AND HAS BEEN LOOKING AFTER ME EVER SINCE. I GO TO CLASS DURING THE DAY, WORK HERE AT NIGHT AND SLEEP IN AN ATTACHED APARTMENT RIGHT HERE.



YOU KNOW, YOU COULD HAVE GOTTEN HURT TONIGHT. OR KILLED.

BUT THEY COULD HAVE HURT SOMEONE...

IT WAS DUMB OF ME. I JUST... IT WASN'T LIKE THEY HAD GUNS OR ANYTHING.

AND THEY WERE IN... IN MY SPACE. I DIDN'T WANT TO LET THE SAME KIND OF THING THAT HAPPENED TO ME HAPPEN TO ANYONE ELSE. IT JUST... SEEMED LIKE THE RIGHT THING TO DO.

YOU'RE RIGHT. IT WAS DUMB OF YOU. IT MIGHT EVEN HAVE BEEN DUMBER THAN SOME OF THE THINGS WE DID WHEN WE WERE BACK WHEN WE WERE IN HIGH SCHOOL TOGETHER. BUT IT WAS ALSO VERY BRAVE, AND FRANKLY, I DIDN'T KNOW YOU HAD IT IN YOU. COME ON, FAITH, CHEER UP A BIT. YOU DON'T HAVE TO DANCE, BUT YOU CAN MINGLE.

IF I REMEMBER CORRECTLY YOU WOULDN'T DANCE WITH ME IF I WANTED YOU TO ANYWAY.

EW, ME? DANCE WITH A GIRL? GREAT GHOSTS, THE ONLY GIRL I EVER WILLINGLY DANCED WITH WAS MAGGIE.

WAIT, YOU DANCED WITH MAGGIE? WHEN DID THIS HAPPEN? MAN, WE STILL HAVE SO MUCH CATCHING UP TO DO...

In ancient times, Halloween, which was apparently called Samhain, was more astronomical... It was when day and night were about equal, with the hard work and bounty of the harvest finished, but with the death and darkness of winter lying ahead. Later, the Christian church adopted the holiday and celebrated it as a day to remember the saints and those who had passed away. They called it all Hallow's Evening. Later, it got abbreviated and became Halloween. But, for a lot of people, it's lost that religious meaning. So you get those like me, thinking of it as a time for the walking dead and monsters hiding in your closet.



However, you know, I think I was wrong about Halloween. I mean, sure, it'll still be about the dead and monsters and whatnot... but Halloween isn't about dwelling on the dead, or what might kill you. Sure, it may look toward the darkest, scariest time of the year... but it's more about looking into that darkness, knowing all of the hardships you've been through and will have to go through in the future, and celebrating that right now, at this instant...

You're still alive.

End Chapter Four: Halloween